

## The Mission Church

When talk began last year about us celebrating our 275<sup>th</sup> anniversary many of you shared that you would like to have included the future of Zion as part of our yearlong celebration. We heard you and full heartedly agree. Without our ancestors keeping in mind the future generations our lives here at Zion could have been a lot different. This is a lesson that we should glean from, cling to and live out. So for the next three months we will look at the past and see how it relates to Zion's future and what we need to do.

In the first 100 years of the congregation the population of the Middletown Valley was growing. In 1767 Middletown is established, communities begin to flourish and the need for churches was springing up throughout the valley. In 1796 our pastor was serving at least seven congregations besides Middletown and by 1827 the pastor's load included nine churches. These churches were called charges or sometimes called the Middletown Pastorate, these churches were in Jefferson, Burkittsville, Myersville, Boonsboro, Lovettsville, VA. By 1850 most of these churches were self sufficient and no longer needed to depend on the pastors and people of Zion. In later years Mt. Tabor church and Harmony became mission churches of Zion with Harmony being the last to separate from Middletown in 1989. For over 200 years Zion has had a mission field right here in our own Valley. Zion has a long history of being supportive in the growth of the Lutheran Church in the valley because the vision was always bringing and sharing the Gospel of Christ.

Zion also has nurtured 37 men and one woman, sons and daughters of the congregation, into pastoral ministry. These 38 ministers received their catechetical instructions here at Zion and faith was cultivated in the home and by our Sunday School teachers and Pastors. The Lutheran Church in America was the benefactor of the labors of our sons and daughter and they have served the church in 18 states and the District of Columbia.

The labors of Zion have gone far beyond the reaches of those in America but have gone out to other countries. We have supported Missionary work in Japan, India and in nations of Africa; Samaritans Purse, Lantern Hill in Mexico, Lutheran World Relief, and many have supported individual children through the world through Christian organizations, to name a few. Through prayer, financial, time and talents, we continue to care for the needs of the world.

As we look back on the 275 years of Zion we begin to see not just the facts of our history but begin to see the people of Zion lived with a purpose. They took from Scripture knowing that God's purpose for his people was to praise Him and with God's help, they provided us a beautiful church edifice to do so. They trusted that from a few seeds in 1740 that God would build his church here in Middletown and He did. Noticing what God has done is the catalyst that motivates us to the call of Mission Work wherever we are. And where does this mission work for you BEGIN? This question hopefully will stir up and renew a fresh purpose in you as we look to our future.

As individuals, our missionary work begins as an inner journey. We need to do personal house cleaning by asking ourselves a few questions, like; "what am I carrying that gets in the way of sharing Christ's love, my growth in faith and serving others?" In this inward journey we need to peel away the earthly "me" so that God can unveil the new creation in "me," the one made in His image. This inward journey includes practicing through devotions, prayer, reading Scripture, and to recognize His presence around us; by seeing what gets in the way and learning to leave behind what is not useful. As we untangle ourselves from our baggage in life, we can discover our authentic self in Christ. However, we can only be missionaries to others if we are first willing to be missionaries to ourselves. Honesty is our most important tool.

We think that since there is fulltime missionaries in the field that takes care of our missionary responsibilities. But this alone does not fill God's requirement. Missionary work is not only in some far off place but the mission field starts in our individual homes. Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples. Those first disciples we encounter are our children and we are to teach them to obey what He has taught. Our children need to see and learn that becoming a disciple of Jesus means being a lifetime learner and follower and this they learn by watching YOU as their parents and grandparents. Our caring conversations that begin in our home with our children and grandchildren is missionary work.

**The field is ripe and ready to harvest;  
go reap it!**

